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An LEA/University Partnership to Integrate Program Development and Evaluation[1]

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ABSTRACT

A university-based office of evaluation research and a unified school district entered into a partnership arrangement for the purpose of developing a model to integrate program development and evaluation. The function of the model was to provide a common framework for all development efforts, regardless of the curricular area, and to use evaluation data at critical junctures in the development process. The integration of development and evaluation through the partnership served to establish a trust relationship between researchers and practitioners. It changed evaluation from adversarial to supportive, nonthreatening activities to the benefit of program development and the final product.

In 1978 Community Unit School District 200 in Wheaton, Illinois began a project intended to make a positive difference for students, teachers, and administrators. It was not funded by a significant grant nor was it initially given a snappy title or clever acronym. The project was predicated on a three-pronged concept of education: a professional staff of teachers and administrators who understand instruction; the best possible curriculum; and an active evaluation program. This triad approach to educational excellence builds on three assumptions.

1. The Curricular Assumption. Able and committed teachers and administrators, given time and resources and a model which demands excellence, can develop a "best" - even an "ideal" - curriculum program. This is particularly the case when each step of the development is presented to other educators, members of the community, and the board of education prior to its acceptance.

2. The Instructional Assumption. It accepts that teachers and administrators can have a common understanding of what constitutes excellent teaching based on research and art. And further, where teachers and administrators see themselves as professional colleagues working for a common goal, they can implement that ideal curriculum through excellent teaching.

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3. The Evaluation Assumption. The third assumption of the triad is a clear acceptance that educational effectiveness can be measured and on-going program evaluation is important to teachers, administrators and students.

An unwritten fourth assumption rests on open communication. To build "the best" educational program for District 200 every level of its constituency must be kept informed and their ideas tapped: teachers not presently actively involved in one of the three sides of the triad, students, the school board, parents, and other community members.

Figure 1 illustrates the educational triad concept. The two sides of the triangle represent curriculum and instruction. These are process concepts that culminate in products. Through curriculum development efforts, an "ideal" curriculum, or at least continual progress toward reaching the ideal curriculum, will emerge. Through staff development efforts that focus on teacher-principal strategies for enhancing effective instruction, the "ideal curriculum" will be properly implemented. The base of the triangle, evaluation, serves as the supporting structure. Information on the adequacy of the process and their products should be continually fed back to the staff for fine tuning the curriculum and instruction. (See Olsen, 1980 for a detailed description of the triad concept.)

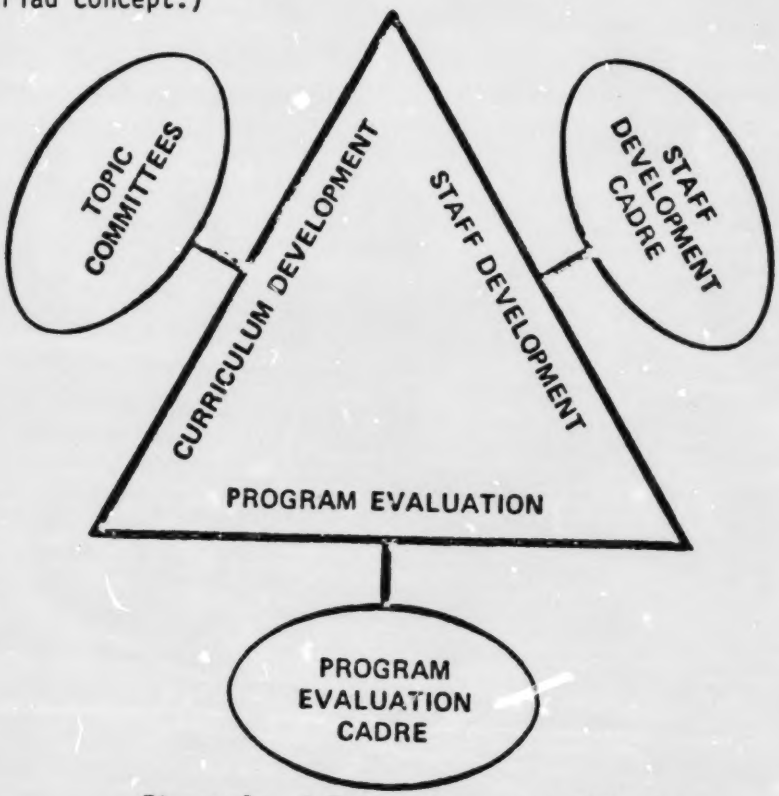

Figure 1. A Triad Approach to Education

This paper focuses on two of the three sides of the triad: curriculum development and evaluation. The first section examines an eight-step curriculum development format and the committees' structure. The second section discusses an evaluation model for integrating development and evaluation. The final section reports on the current status of the triad and what has been learned.

Curriculum Development

The Process

In 1978 the board of education approved the triad concept and an eight step format for curriculum development. The outstanding teachers at the elementary, junior high and high school levels as well as administrative representatives were invited personally by the Superintendent and asked to serve for five years. They were not given any stipend or advantage beyond the assurance that they were to be the group in the district relative to their topic, and that they could count on the continuous support of the superintendent's office. They were expected to follow an eight step format for curriculum development and do the best thing ever done.

The rate of acceptance and continuation was nearly one hundred percent and five additional committees were established the next year. The eight step format for development requires papers at each phase. These documents are presented to teachers in the topic area who are then asked to respond. A public hearing is held on each phase, and finally the committee makes a formal public presentation to the board of education. The document then becomes the district's position on that aspect of the curriculum.

The Eight Step Development Format

1. Why? The first step in the curriculum development process serves as a challenge to the committee; it must justify the existence of its curricular area. If a few strong statements can be made, and documented, on why something should exist, the development of a program to achieve these purposes has a foundation.

2. The Ideal. Step two asks the committee to determine what the ideal curriculum would be as predicated on the statement of justification. Too often educators think in minimal terms. What can we do for next year? How can we get by with what we have? This mind set results in a survival approach to

educational issues. An ideal curriculum design directs decisions about resources and leads to incremental progress toward the ideal.

3. Program Expectations. An ideal program must produce ideal results and provide the basis for specific expectations. This phase of the process provides for such definitions. For example, it would be an expectation that an ideal reading curriculum would be so organized and implemented that no student (not neurologically impaired) would go from elementary to junior high school or from junior high to senior high school without the reading tools needed for success.

4. What Is Now? After the why, the ideal and the expectations of the ideal curriculum program for the entire district have been written, discussed and adopted, it is appropriate to document what is presently offered. Too often curriculum committees begin with the present and make changes on what is rather than determining what ought to be. In this procedure the present program establishes base line data to be used in evaluating the new program.

5. Program Development. With the ideal and the existing program both well defined, the development of the new program is a natural next step. Much of what is in the new program has been taking form as the committees build upon the work in the other previous steps.

6. Program Implementation. After all the preceding work has been accomplished, the new program is initiated. The form of implementation may be an expanded piloting on grade level or across grades in selected schools. While the program is designed to be comprehensive it is implemented incrementially as resources permit.

7. Program Monitoring. After the program is implemented the topic committees continue their role as the primary authority for their topic. Their work changes as the evaluation process increases in its role. The new program is monitored along predetermined time lines and according to predetermined procedures.

8. Program Improvement. Based upon the evaluation findings, the committees review the new programs and make any needed changes. The traditional method of a committee forming and adopting a new program or text and then not following the implementation over years has most often resulted in the continuation of weaknesses or the individual teacher accommodates to the problems. Steps 7 and 8 insure constant evaluation and constant improvement if and when needed.

The important issue of informing and inservicing teachers on any new program is an essential component of this curriculum development process. It links curriculum development to instruction, the other side of the triad, through staff development.

Evaluation

Rationale of the LEA/University Evaluation Partnership

Evaluators can assume different roles in their service to educational institutions. They can stand apart from the daily institutional activities or they can work as partners with school district staff. In the former role evaluators appear to render views independent of school politics. This role carries with it an aura of scientific objectivity. In a partnership role, however, evaluators and school staff, together, can make the evaluation activities an integral part of program development and implementation. The evaluators do not stand above institutional politics but must learn to work through the structure and help the practitioners identify pitfalls. Evaluation data become more meaningful to the users as the findings respond to their questions and concerns. Such evaluation does not, however, mitigate the need for adherence to the strictest canons of evaluation research. With this rationale as a given, the external evaluators became facilitators and teachers, making their expertise a tool to be drawn upon by the various program development committees (Cronbach & Associates, 1980; Talmage & Haertel, 1981).

The Generic Program Evaluation Model

The evaluation side of the triad evolved out of a cooperative partnership between school personnel and the staff at a university-based office of evaluation research. This facet of the triad, while clear as to its intent, lacked a conceptual framework for linking evaluation to program development. An external evaluation office was called in to design an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the new programs once they were implemented. It was evident that evaluation in terms of effectiveness would be premature. What was needed was a generalized model for all program committees, one that could be responsive to the unique problems of each committee, at the same time address common curricular issues. Through the use of a common framework, development efforts could be coordinated, and the work of one committee used to support subsequent efforts of other committees.

Purpose and features of a generic evaluation model. A generic evaluation model is a barebone structure or framework around which each curriculum development committee can build its program with the aid and support of evaluation. The framework should be sufficiently comprehensive to allow the different committees the leeway to exercise creativity and to attend to the unique or particular needs of a given program. A common framework also should provide a linkage

among the committees' efforts. A generic model, thus, assists the committees in exchanging ideas and ensuring that their efforts are serving the total educational program of the district. The model serves two major purposes: (1) to facilitate the work of the various committees by providing evaluative data at critical junctures in the work of the committees; and (2) to assess the value or worth of the resulting products or segments of the products.

To accomplish the two purposes, the model incorporates the following features in the design:

1. An ongoing partnership arrangement between District 200 and OER.[2]
2. An evaluation design that parallels the District's 8-step program development efforts.
3. An active role for the staff in planning and carrying out evaluation tasks.
4. Avenues through which District 200 staff acquire evaluation skills for immediate and future application.
5. Attention to the need to involve greater numbers of people in the work of the committee for awareness, input, and approval.

Forging the model. The model emerged as the central staff of District 200 and OER staff first worked independently, then through discussions between the partners and sharing of new drafts and input from the school board. The principals' group and each curriculum development committee made their contributions. Open board meetings provided for community questions and suggestions. Each draft became somewhat less embedded in educanese, finally reflecting a language that the district felt comfortable using. It then became a matter of sharing the design and the language until all constituencies could internalize the model.

Overview of the generic model. The design of the generic model parallels the eight steps of curriculum development and introduces evaluation procedures at appropriate stages of the curriculum development committee's work. A consistent format is followed from step to step as the respective committees proceed through each of the eight steps. The format includes:

1. A statement of purpose of the curriculum development step;
2. A precise statement of the outcome of curriculum development and of the evaluation;
3. A list of committee tasks, sequentially arranged, to assist in reaching the outcome curriculum development outcome(s);

[2]Office of Evaluation Research,(OER)

4. A list of tasks, sequentially arranged, to assist in reaching the evaluation outcome(s);
5. An outline integrating curriculum and evaluation tasks, sequentially.

The "ideal" step in the generic model is shown at the end of this paper.

The Evaluation Process and the Cadre

As each committee moves through the various steps in the curriculum development process the members carry out the supporting evaluation tasks. The data are them incorporated in the development activities. Evaluation tasks in the first several steps of the generic model are mostly in the form of input from the many school constituencies and outside experts, should the latter be of help. As the development moves to Step 5, development of the program, the committee correlates the expectations from Step 3 with the salient program features that purport to deliver on these features (from Steps 3 and 5--the Ideal and Program Development). Each outcome is given an operational description. In Step 6, Program Implementation, a two-tier evaluation design is fleshed out to obtain information on both the process and the outcomes. Heavy emphasis, however, is on the process evaluation, during this step. An implementation plan is usually a pilot study; implementation will differ from one curricular area to another.

To help the curriculum development committees use evaluation as an integral part of the development efforts, a cadre of in-house evaluators are being trained. The cadre is composed of teachers and administrators who have undergone a year's inservice in acquiring evaluation skills and strategies. Cadre members are assigned to the various curriculum development committees to assist the members in linking the curricular and evaluation tasks in each step of the generic model.

Current Status of the Triad

The current status and what has been learned are considered from the perspective of the LEA and then from that of its university partner.

From the Perspective of District 200

Expectations for the triad are high and touches all educational facets of the district. It is too soon to know if all anticipated outcomes will be achieved. We can make the following observations.

- The concept of a partnership between a university staff and a local district is important, good, and workable. The relationship is of great value to each organization and, at best, offers a pattern of use to other districts and universities.
- The "evolution" of the curriculum development and program evaluation model required some "backtracking" by the topic committees and slowed an already detailed approach. It is expected that future committees will be able to move faster.
- It is possible for a district to determine why it is teaching a topic and what it expects to achieve, and to do it before the program is implemented.
- It is possible to determine in advance of a program's implementation what methods of evaluation will be used, when, and by whom.
- It is difficult to increase awareness and acceptance of systematic curriculum development integrated with evaluation but it can be done well in a local school system.

From the Perspective of the University-based Evaluators

The university-based evaluators re-learn the same lesson again and again as they test their "wares" in the real world:

- Ideas are alive and vital in the LEA.
- A partnership means sharing through challenge, discussion, argumentation, and deep-felt appreciation for differing perspectives.
- An idea is only as good as the practitioner can see it as feasible in practice.

- It is possible to make evaluation integral to curriculum development.
- It is possible for teachers and administrators to value evaluation information by viewing it as a supportive rather than a threatening activity.
- There are basic evaluative skills that should be a part of every teacher and administrator's professional background, just as there are curriculum development skills that are necessary to understand classroom instruction.

In summary we can say an evaluation research partnership can be a vehicle for establishing a trust relationship among administrators, teachers, and external evaluators, one in which each group brings to bear its insights and expertise in jointly designing evaluation research studies. Such a relationship helps to prevent adversary tensions as it incorporates evaluation into program development as a supportive, nonthreatening activity.

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THE IDEAL: Step 2

The purpose of Step 2 in the 8-step program development plan is to generate an "Ideal" program focusing on the goals, content, and organization of such a program. The direction for building an Ideal program will come from the outcome statements completed in Step 1 (Why?) and a study of the present state of the art in the program under development.

Outcomes

Curriculum Outcome

When Step 2 is completed, your committee will have a prepared document of an IDEAL program for the Board of Education's consideration. It will include an outline of an IDEAL program that addresses the basic curriculum design questions: goals of the program; content; and suggestions for accomplishing the goals.

Evaluation Outcome

The committee will have incorporated the suggestions of teachers, administrators, internal and external specialists, and others in the preparation of the ideal program and a written statement of justification of the IDEAL program.

Curriculum and Evaluation Tasks

To attain the outcomes, the committee should consider the following tasks and complete those that are appropriate.

Curriculum Tasks (CT)

1. Discuss the characteristics of an IDEAL program from the following perspectives:
   - -- What should the program contain? What is the focus of the program?
     - Example 1: Social studies - should the IDEAL program be issues oriented? Societal centered? Process oriented? Sequentially arranged?
     - Example 2: Gifted program - should the focus be on enrichment? Interest? Acceleration? Enhancing cognitive processing skills? Developing aesthetic sensitivities?
   - -- What should the program accomplish? What types of attitudes, behaviors, skills, knowledge should students gain as a result of participating in the IDEAL program.
   - -- How can the student outcomes best be accomplished? Type of instruction? Type of school organization?
   - -- What facets of the IDEAL program are particularly suited to District 200 students?

2. Collect information on what is on the horizon in your program area. You may want to assign committee members to review the current professional publications, talk to specialists in the field, look at other programs.

3. Formulate a set of statements that best respond to the questions discussed in task #1. You will want to use:
   -- The information obtained in task #2.
   -- The OUTCOME statement prepared for Step 1, WHY?

4. Using the information obtained from the evaluation (see Evaluation Task #1 below), re-prioritize your statements prepared in task #3 above.

5. Using the statements from task #4 above, lay out a draft of an IDEAL program. You will need to:
   -- Develop a set of goal statements. Separate curriculum goals, instructional goals, and the goals for the organization supporting the IDEAL program.
   -- Develop a content outline based on the goals statements. The content can be the subject matter or whatever it is the program is offering to students.
   -- Prepare a statement of justification of the IDEAL program. The committee will want to refer to the OUTCOME statement prepared for Step 1, WHY?, and to tasks #2 and #4 above.

6. Using the information obtained from the evaluation (see Evaluation Task #2 below), prepare the IDEAL program for presentation to the Curriculum Review Board.

7. Using the input from the Curriculum Review Board, prepare a document of the IDEAL program for presentation to the Board of Education.

Evaluation Tasks (ET)

1. Obtain the input of representative teachers, administrators, and others on prioritizing Curriculum Task #3.
   -- Prepare an instrument for surveying a representative sample of teachers, administrators and others on prioritizing the statements in Curriculum Task #3.
   -- Randomly select representative respondents.
   -- Work out a plan for distributing the instrument and collecting the responses.
   -- Tabulate the responses and organize the findings for presentation to the committee.
   -- Interpret the findings and use in Curriculum Task #4.

2. Establish a review panel to critique the IDEAL program as completed in Curriculum Task #5.
   -- Identify specialists to make up the panel who will review the IDEAL program. Include both internal and external specialists.
   -- Set up a schedule of meetings for the panel.
   -- Charge the panel with setting up criteria for reviewing the IDEAL program.
   -- After the panel reviews the IDEAL program, meet jointly with them to discuss the review.
   -- Use this information to complete Curriculum Task #6.

OER Assistance to the Committee

To assist the committee, OER will:

(1) Meet with the committee to interpret the curriculum and evaluation tasks. Depending on the nature of the program under development, the interpretation will vary.

(2) Work with the committee on any of the subtasks in Evaluation Task #1 that the committee feels it needs assistance.

(3) Work with the committee on any of the subtasks in Evaluation Task #2 that the committee feels it needs assistance. Special attention may need to be given to establishing criteria for reviewing the IDEAL program.

Sequencing the Tasks

CT #1 - Discussion

CT #2 - Collect information

CT #3 - Formulate statements

ET #1 - Survey teachers, administrators, others

CT #4 - Re-prioritize statements from CT #3

CT #5 - Lay out draft of an IDEAL program

ET #2 - Establish a review panel

CT #6 - Prepare draft of IDEAL program for the Curriculum Review Board

CT #7 - Present the IDEAL program to the Board of Education